

April 2001



SchoolHealthConnections

School Health Connections is an interdepartmental program between the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education dedicated to improving the health and academic success of children and youth. This is accomplished through a coordinated school health system that combines health education, health promotion, disease prevention, and access to health-related services in an integrated manner.

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Outreach

in

Action

CONNECTING KIDS TO HEALTH CARE

## PARENTS SPEAK OUT



Happy and healthy, the Krahmer children are part of the Healthy Families Program. Left to right: Ryan, 9; Ahnika, 4; and Adam, 11



### THE KRAHMER FAMILY

Eric Krahmer always had a special calling in life. Although his primary occupation was as an engineer, it was his work as a pastor that was his true profession. Eric finally decided to quit his engineering job and become a full-time minister.

Unfortunately, he hit an unanticipated snag almost immediately. Eric discovered that paying for health insurance for his children required half his salary. "I was torn between serving the church and caring for my own children. I worried about how I could be a minister and still support my children. I wanted to make sure they had health insurance. Both boys at the time badly needed glasses."

Researching how much health insurance was going to cost him was a terrible letdown for Eric. But he had the answer to his situation all along. "The day I left my

engineering job, someone gave me a Healthy Families application and handbook. It didn't register at the time, but I finally realized this was the solution to my family's health care predicament. I filled out the application, mailed it in, and that was it. And the health coverage my kids received through Healthy Families was even better than what they had before, when I was working at my old engineering job."

Eric realized that there are ways to help others. "There are people in my congregation who need health insurance for their kids, and I've been able to direct them to Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Children."

**"Getting information on affordable health care coverage to parents through the school is a high priority for me."**

—Erik Krahmer  
Parent and School PTA President

Eric also guides and helps people as the PTA president of his children's school. "Many parents are unaware of the wonderful but affordable health care coverage available through Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Children. Getting information to parents through the school is a high priority for me."

### THE GONZALEZ FAMILY

"When I lost my job I started feeling less like an honorable husband and father. I was taught to work and provide for my family, and now I was having trouble doing so."

Anthony Gonzalez was a victim of his company's downsizing three years ago. Health care coverage for his children (two girls, 13 and 10 years of age, and a 4-year old son) vanished along with his job. His kids are very athletic; they are involved in soccer, fast pitch softball, track, volleyball and martial arts. Anthony was in a quandary. "Was I supposed to tell my kids to stop playing sports just in case one of them got hurt?" In addition, one of his daughters had a serious thyroid condition that required regular medication.

"Before I lost my job I urged my wife to leave her high pressure corporate job. She was stressed and didn't want to be there. I encouraged her to become a teacher in our kids' school, which is what she really wanted to do.

**"The godsend for my family came at school...we received information about Healthy Families."**

—Anthony Gonzalez,  
Parent

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She took a huge cut in pay to accept this job, but I said to her then, 'Honey, I'll take care of you and the kids.' Anthony felt like he failed his wife, but he still didn't want her to go back to her old corporate job.

"While doing security work and substitute teaching on the side, I started looking for permanent work with good health benefits. But I lost my confidence. I was humbled. It took a long time to find a job." Anthony was able to keep his children insured for only four months before the staggering cost of health coverage forced him to cancel his kids' insurance.

"The godsend for my family came at the school where my wife teaches," says Anthony. "It was there that she received information about Healthy Families. I'm a stubborn man, and I don't believe in accepting handouts. Healthy Families didn't make me feel that way. Within a short time all of our children were enrolled for only \$27 a month. Knowing my kids were covered by Healthy Families meant peace of mind for my wife and me." Even after Anthony found a job, it took six months for the benefits to kick in.

Anthony sings the praises of Healthy Families. "While we had Healthy Families coverage, there were still times when it was a challenge to pay the \$27 monthly premiums. But the Healthy Families administrators were great. The insurance is comprehensive, and my daughter with the overactive thyroid condition was always able to get her blood tests and other health services she needed."

Today the Gonzalez family is back on track. Anthony is working, and his entire family has health coverage. However, Anthony says he will always remember the stress his family went through. "It's good to know that no matter what happens to my family financially, my children will always have the option of receiving vital medical, dental and vision care coverage through Healthy Families."

## THE FOLKERTS FAMILY

"I was in a downward spiral, falling into depression. What I didn't know at the time was that my 7-year-old son Kevin was going with me."

Carolyn Folkerts of Long Beach had a bad year in 1997. She went through a divorce and found her life at its lowest point. "I had no husband, was unable to work, had a small son who depended on me for everything, and on top of that, I had no money to pay for health insurance for both of us."

When friends took her to a county medical hospital following problems resulting from the pressure, Carolyn says that experience "scared me straight. I realized I had to turn my life around." It was at the hospital that she found out she was eligible for Medi-Cal.

***"The more a school can promote health insurance, the more lives that can be improved."***

**—Carolyn Folkerts,  
Parent**

Medi-Cal covered Carolyn's regular medical and counseling care. Because she lacked money for someone to take care of Kevin while she was visiting her psychologist, she would take Kevin along, and he would sit in the waiting room.

"It was my psychologist who discovered that Kevin wasn't well either. She explained to me that depression is different in children than in adults, which is why I missed the symptoms. But he was badly depressed, too."

Kevin's behavior was poor at home. He underachieved at school, was unable to complete tasks and was unmotivated. Also, his reading and composition skills were far below grade level.

Kevin was eligible for Medi-Cal for Children and shortly after being enrolled in the program began sessions at the Community Family Guidance Center in Cerritos. "They were wonderful with Kevin," says Carolyn. "His therapist came to the school and met with Kevin's teachers."

## CALIFORNIA'S BLUEPRINT FOR COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH

### BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH: CALIFORNIA'S BLUEPRINT (SCHOOL HEALTH BLUEPRINT).

The **School Health Blueprint** is a newly published document developed by a broad-based team of more than 70 individuals representing local, county and state-level health and education agencies, community-based organizations, higher education, students, parents, health professionals and community and business leaders.

The Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education jointly convened the team. The **School Health Blueprint** is a call to action to strengthen coordinated school health in California.

The **School Health Blueprint** is organized around six goals that state and local agencies can use. The six goals are: 1) youth development, 2) policy development, 3) funds and resources, 4) collaboration and coordination, 5) personnel capacity and 6) research-based strategies.

A copy of the **School Health Blueprint** is available by faxing your request to (916) 653-2781. Please include your name, address and phone number. It is also available on the Web at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/lsp/health/>.



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# CALIFORNIA STATE PTA SAYS HEALTHY CHILDREN LEARN

## THE CALIFORNIA STATE PTA RECOGNIZES THAT:

- A child's ability to learn is directly related to his or her state of health and that inadequate health care can be a barrier to education;
- Basic preventive health care can prevent permanent disability or lengthy remediation, and is a cost-effective use of health care dollars.

—(from a position statement adopted in 1992 and revised in July 1998)

The California Parent Teacher Association (PTA) doesn't mince words when it comes to student health and academic achievement.

"The California PTA believes that if we don't address health needs, no matter how much money we pour into education reform, children are not going to be performing to the best of their abilities," says Nancy Spradling, vice president of the California PTA.

"When a family is stressed with health issues, including a lack of insurance, it is going to affect the kids' performance at school. If a child doesn't have access to health care, there is an impact on his or her learning. Whether the issue is chronic asthma and the need for proper monitoring and medication or poor vision and a need for glasses, it affects the child and the classroom."

### CALL TO ACTION FOR TEACHERS

Spradling sees the important task of providing eligible children with affordable health care coverage as a partnership between schools, parents and the local community. "Communication can be poor. We need coordination in the school districts with parents and community groups working as a unit."



Spradling encourages schools to send information home to parents about Healthy Families, Medi-Cal for Children and other affordable health coverage programs. "The natural route is at the beginning of the school year when back-to-school packets are distributed. Throughout the year information should continue to go home to the parents."

Spradling says that teachers should be active in getting health care coverage information to parents. "We need to involve teachers and help them understand the importance of encouraging uninsured families to enroll in affordable health coverage programs. Being actively involved won't be the burden they may think it will be. Teachers could identify which students don't have health insurance and help them get covered."

***"We must work together  
to close the gap in  
uninsured children."***

**—Nancy Spradling  
California PTA Vice President**

Spradling says that even parents who currently have health care coverage need to become involved. "We're all in this together. What affects some children in a classroom has the potential to affect all of the children." Spradling suggests encouraging parents to help other parents in filling out the program application forms, perhaps in a bi-monthly Saturday

morning gathering at the school. "Because there may be a stigma attached to admitting the need for health coverage, parents who are currently receiving coverage from the Healthy Families Program would be the best choice to encourage others to do the same."

Spradling says that the bottom line is "we have far too many children in this state with little or no health care coverage. In fact, we have parents who have little or no coverage. We must work together to close the gap in uninsured children. The closing line in our position statement says it all:

*The California State PTA supports efforts to provide equal access to quality, affordable basic preventive health care for all children, youth, pregnant women and their families."*

## HEALTHY FAMILIES DEMONSTRATION PROJECT COVERAGE OF PARENTS

***The state of California has submitted a waiver request to the federal Health Care Financing Administration to expand Healthy Families Program coverage to parents of eligible children. If approved, the Healthy Families Demonstration Project will be implemented with an intended start date of July 1, 2001.***





Within a month there was a remarkable difference in Kevin. Other parents were even commenting to me on how this was not the child they knew."

After five months, there were phenomenal changes. Kevin's reading comprehension moved to a seventh-grade level and his writing composition skills were tested between a fifth- and seventh-grade level. His teacher could only ask, "What on earth happened? What motivated him?"

Carolyn Folkerts' life, as well as Kevin's, is now at a happy place. Carolyn substitutes regularly at an area elementary school. "The more a school can do to promote health insurance for all children, the more lives that can be improved. I know! It happened to Kevin and me."

Carolyn talks about how Medi-Cal has positively affected the Folkerts' lives. "I'm a prime example of why state-sponsored health insurance exists. I'm not a deadbeat. I was just at a point in my life where I couldn't afford health insurance for Kevin, and I had to get it."

"I am grateful to Medi-Cal for giving me a place to go when I needed it most. Once I had health insurance for Kevin, I had peace of mind knowing that the state was providing my son with complete medical, dental and vision care coverage."

## NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

### WHAT?

\$6 million for Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Children school outreach efforts have been included in the Governor's budget, subject to approval by the Legislature.

### HOW MUCH?

Local funding awards will range from \$150,000 - \$300,000 per year for a two-year time frame.

### WHO CAN APPLY?

Collaborations of school districts, county offices of education, local health departments, community-based organizations and other groups interested in linking with schools are eligible.

### WHEN?

A Request for Application (RFA) was released on March 19, 2001. The Notice of Intent to Apply is due by April 10, 2001. Applications are due to the State by May 8, 2001 (postmarked.)

### WHERE CAN I GET INFORMATION?

Copies of the RFA are available at [www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/omcp](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/mcs/omcp) under the link "Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Children Outreach" or you can e-mail your mailing address to [vcrocker@dhs.ca.gov](mailto:vcrocker@dhs.ca.gov) or fax 916/653-2781.



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